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# BLACK DIA

in "THE MASK OF TERROR"

JAMESVILLE WAS A QUIET HAMLET ON THE MISSOLIRI RIVER! NOTHING MUCH EVER HAPPENED AT JAMES VILLE LANDING! NOTHING EXCEPT A CATTLE AUCTION OR A MINSTREL SHOW OR A CHURCH PICNIC! NOTHING, IN SHORT, TO CAUSE THAT FRONTIER TROUBLE-SHOOTER, THE BLACK DIAMOND, TO TAKE THE SAFETY OFF HIS .44! YET, ONE SPRING NIGHT IN JAMESVILLE LANDING, ALL HECK BUSTED LOOSE! DEATH STRUCK SUDDENLY AND VIOLENTLY ON THE RIVER TOWN DOCK... AND THAT WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF A LONG VOYAGE OF HORROR!





























AND SO THE MISSOURI QUEEN LIFTS ANCHOR AND NOSES ITS WAY INTO MID-STREAM! ITS DECKS ARE LINED WITH PASSENGERS! ITS HOLD IS FULL OF FREIGHT! THE MISSOURI QUEEN HAS EVERYTHING ABOARD...INCLUDING ONE GRUESOME, INVISIBLE STOWNWAY... SUDDEN DEATH!























JUDGE VARICK IS CAPABLE OF

ANY KIND OF LAW-BREAKING





NICE GUY! SOME DAY

I HOPE I HAVE AN

























THEN WE'LL BURN HER! THERE'LL BE

NO CLUES! IT'LL BE THE WORST











SORRY CAPTAIN! THIS HERE



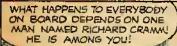




AND IF CRAMM DOES REVEAL HIMSELF, THE SLAUGHTER WILL

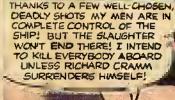
HAPPEN

ANYWAY!



YOU WERE RIGHT, BLACK DIAMOND! JUDGE VARICK IS MIXED UP IN THE SHOOTING!























IN FOR SOME CLEAN GOVERN-MENT FROM NOW ON!

2 3) 2

MERE'S A SURPRISE, BLACK DIAMOND! NO WONDER VARICK COULDN'T FIND RICHARD CRAMM! CRAMM WAS A CODE NAME FOR ... FIFT D'ORLEANS!

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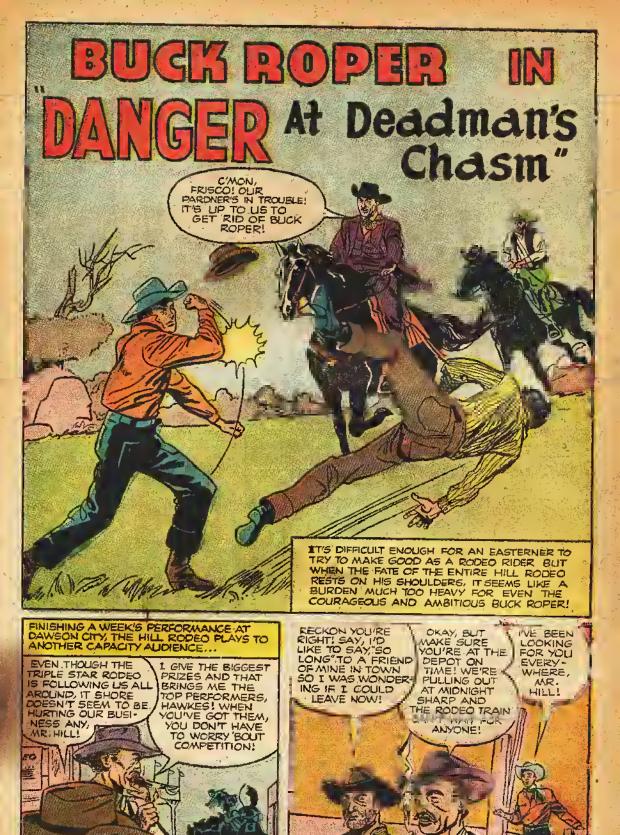
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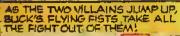








































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## Trigger Happy

Ralph Pritchard was fifteen years old, and scared. His wide brimmed stetson shielded his eyes from the sun and his hands rested on the handles of forty-fives that hung within easy reach at his sides. He squinted at a tin can on the fence that looked a hundred miles away instead of the 100 yards that actually separated them.

The guns were his and he meant to wear them. Pops Gordon had given them to him on his fourteenth birthday, and for the past year they had decorated a wall in his bedroom.

"Happy Birthday," Pops told him a year ago, and handed him two man-sized forty-fives.
"When a boy reaches fourteen he's a man and should he wearing shootin' irons,"

"Fiddlesricks!" Ralph's father snorted. "The boy has no right to wear a gun until he

knows how to use it . . . . and has a reason to wear it."

Ralph remembered fingering the guns, and trying to keep the tears from forming in the corners of his eyes. "Give the kid a chance, Buck," Pops said. "He's going to grow up some day and he may as well start now. There ain't no better way then totin' six guns to give a fellow some confidence."

"I don't agree, Pops. Ralph will become the targer of any killer that comes along. He'd be dead before he learned how to shoot. And as for that confidence, if a man has to

depend on a gun, he's only half a man,"

Pops rubbed the stubble of his beard thoughtfully. "I didn't mean that, Buck, Shucks, if a fellow needs a gun to feel like a man be ain't much good, but its like learning to ride, rope, and working with the men that makes a boy a man,"

Ralph tried to swallow the large lump in his throat, and his father caught the tear that

had escaped and rolled down his cheek, Ralph turned and brushed it away.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," his father said. "Learn how to shoot the guns, learn how to draw and hit a target. In shorr, when you show me you know how to use them, you can wear them."

. That was when Ralph did something he hadn't done since he was a kid. He rushed

up and kissed his father, then ran out of the room with his holstered guns.

That was a year ago. That was before he started target practice until the barrels turned ted with heat. He had learned everything Pops bad to teach except how to shoot on the draw.

"The kid's trigger-happy," Pops explained to Ralph's father one day, "but only on the draw," He scratched his head, "I don't understand it. The kid can shoot anything be can see, but when he draws, he's too anxious, The bullets start flyin' in every direction, and it's only by the grace o' God that he hasn't blown his toes off!"

"That's what I thought." Buck snapped. "The kid's too young to shoot. He don't

wear those guns until he can handle 'em.''

"He'll handle 'em," Pops shouted as Buck walked away, "If I have to club the

know-how into his head,"

Ralph could still hear Pop's angry words as his hand rested on the hone handled guns. He squinted at the can resting on the fence and he repeated Pop's instructions. "Whip out the guns, count five, then shoot the can down."

He drew a deep breath, yanked at the guns, and counted five. The numbers jumped through his mind, and the triggers sent the bullets flying. He knew even before the dust

danced at his feet that he had counted too quickly, and had fired too fast.

Some of the cowhands snickered, one of them guffawed, 'Don't worry, kid. You can

always become a cook - then you won't need shootin' irons! Haw!"

Ralph turned, loosened the belt, and headed for the ranch office. There was oil and cloth there to clean the guns. His farher snapped at the laugher, "Lefty! Come on down to the office."

"Yeah, boss," a smirk decorated Lefty's face, as he fell in step and walked to the

house.

Ralph sat in a corner of the room spreading the oil and cloths in front of him, His father sat on the top of the desk and ignored him. He pointed the chewed end of a cigar at the cowhand, "I've got the paytoll in the safe, Lefty, and I want a man here tonight to look after it. We'll finish the round-up late tonight, but I don't want the money gone by the time we get back.

"Sorry, boss, but I got no one for the job. I got two men sick, I got one man with that sick calf ....." know, I know," Buck waved his cigar impatiently,

"but I've got to have a man here."

"Why not him?" Lefty jerked a thumb at Ralph, There was a smile on his lips, "The kid may not shoot fast, but he shoots often,"

Ralph looked up and for the first time in his life he saw a steely fire in his father's eyes. "Yes, why not," his father snapped. "Ralph, you'll watch the safe tonight while we're out hringing the steers in. And remember this," his father cautioned. "You don't have to be a hero. If you notice anything wrong, one shot will bring the ranch hands down."

"All right, Lefty, get your men together for the toundup. We've got a man to stand

guard tonight,"

\* \* \* \* \*

It was dark out, and the house was ablaze with light. Ralph wore both holsters low. He had found a pair of calf skin gloves that hugged his hands as tight as skin itself. The guns wouldn't slip when he called on them.

He walked nervously through the office trying the door again which he knew to he

locked . . . and the window which he knew was shut tight,

The lights bothered him. What a target he made. He turned out all the lights and pulled a chair over to a corner where he could watch the safe, and the door. Sitting in the datkness he tested his gun's ability to slide out of the holsters. He could feel the stocks through the gloves, and the leather kissed the bone handles with a possessive affection that made his heart sing. He let the guns slip hack into their holsters and watched the shadows on the wall that moved with the moon.

Ralph folded his arms, closed his eyes, and sat. How long he sat this way he didn't know. Pethaps he napped for awhile and then something happened that snapped him upright in his chair. The holt on the door moved. A shadow eased itself into the room, stood will for a property and the later than the door moved.

still for a moment, and then headed for the safe.

Ralph blinked his eyes. Could it be his father? No. He would have put the lights on. Might he one of the ranch hands playing a practical joke. And then an iey feeling gtipped his heart, it could he a thief!

Ralph slid off the chair, It creaked loudly as he moved. The thief spun around and called out, "Ralph! I know you're in here somewhere. Do you want to take your twelve shots at me now and stop a hullet yourself or do you want to be a nice kid and hide somewhere?" A nasty laugh punctuated the air that Ralph could recognize anywhere. It was Lefty Brandt!

"What do you want, Mr. Brandt?" Ralph's voice squeaked thin. He had meant to say, "Get out Lefty hefore you do something you're going to he sorry for." Or, "Touch the safe again and I'll fill you full of holes." Instead he just said, "What do you want,

Mr. Brandt?"

"I want the money kid," Brandt told him. There's enough here for me to huy my own ranch, and I'm warning you, no kid is going to stop me."

"I'm going to stop you, Mr. Brandt." Ralph's voice still squeaked but the determina-

tion was unmistakahle,

"All right, kid," Brandt shouted, "you asked for it, Draw!"

Ralph's fingers slid down to his guns, and in anticipation they seemed to leap into his hands. And then the darkness exploded, Lefty had turned on the lights, and Ralph, with his guns in his hands stood still as the light crowded out the blackness. Then he saw the figure of Lefty against the wall, drawing his gun.

Two bullets exploded from Ralph's guns. His first shot kicked the gun out of Lefty's.

hand, the second bit viciously into Lefty's shoulder, spinning him atound.

Brandt fell to the ground, moaning, "You lousy kid. You lousy little kid."

"Told you, Buck, the kid could shoot," Pops chuckled, "Tell me, Ralph, what did you count to -- five or ten?".

"Neither, Pops." Ralph said slowly, "I was too excited to count. I just waited for the flash of light to disappear so I could see him. When I could see him I fired, And you know 20mething, Pops, I'll never forget that black spot. It seemed like forever but it was only a second -- long enough to line up my guns."

"Yeah,"coughed Pops, "That's what I was tryin' to teach you -- to line up your guns."
"Come on," Ralph's father broken in. "We've got a round-up on. "Let's go."

He turned in time to see Ralph slipping off his guns and shouted, "That means you, too, Ralph." He slipped his arm around the grinning hoy. "We need EVERY MAN we got for THIS job. Strap on your guns and come along."

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## WESTERN LORE

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE WESTERN BADMEN,
FEW PEACE OFFICERS LIVED AS RECKLESS A LIFE
AS DID MARSHAL BILL TILGHMAN! FOR TILGHMAN!,
WHO WAS KNOWN FOR HIS LIGHTNING FAST DRAW,
ALWAYS ALLOWED HIS ADVERSARY TO DRAW FIRST!
DESPITE THIS TILGHMAN KEPT HIS JOB AS LAWMAN FOR OVER FIFTY YEARS, BEFORE HE DIED
WITH HIS BOOTS ON!



WOMAN OF THE FABULOUS WEST EVER LIVED A MORE NOTORIOUS LIFE THAN DID BELLE STARR! HER FEATS MADE IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT SHE WORE SKIRTS AND EARNED HER THE TITLE THE ORIGINAL GUN GIRL OF THE WEST"! BUT BELLE. AS DID JESSE JAMES, MET DEATH AT THE HANDS OF ONE OF HER MOST TRUSTED MEN! BELLE STARR WATE BURIED AS SHE LIVED ... WITH A SIX SHOOTER IN HER HAND!

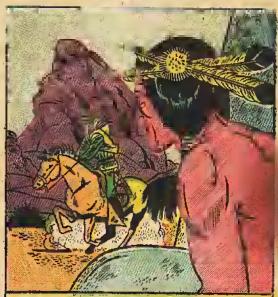


THE HUGE AREA WHICH TAKES IN THE STATES OF MEBRASKA, SOUTH DAVOTA, MONTANA AND WIDMING WAS ONCE CALLED "THE GREAT AMERICAN DESERT"!
WITH THE DISCOVERY OF GOLD, CAME THE VICIOUS GUNFIGHTERS TO ESTABLISH THE MOST NOTORIOUS SETTLEMENT OF ALL...DODGE CITY! BUT THE COMING OF THE LAW AND THE RAILROAD BROUGHT PEACE AND STABILITY TO WHAT ARE NOW FOUR OF AMERICAS RICHEST MINING AND FARMING STATES!





OFALL THE INDIANS OF THE SOUTHWEST. THE MOST WARLIKE THAT THE WHITE MAN HAS ENCOUNTERED HAS BEEN THE APACHE! FROM 1849 TO 1900, UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF COCHISE, VICTORIO AND GERONMO, IT WAS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO SUBDUE THEM! THEY PUT UP A GALLANT FIGHT, FINALLY LOSING OUT TO SUPERIOR NUMBERS! THUS, BECOMING THE LAST TRIBE TO BE CONQUERED BY THE WHITE MAN!



F IT'S ONE INDIAN—BE FRIENDLY! IF IT'S

TWO INDIANS—BE CAREFUL! IF IT'S THREE
INDIANS—BE CAREFUL! IF IT'S THREE
INDIANS—BE CAREFUL! IF IT'S THREE
INDIANS—BUR! NEVER SHOOT HE DARING,
FEARLESS RIDERS OF THE PONY EXPRESS
WHO FACED EVERY DANGER TO GET THE MAIL
THROUGH!: DURING THE TIME THE PONY
EXPRESS WAS IN EXISTENCE, ISO TO ISO!,
ONLY ONE MAIL WAS LOST WITH ITS CARRIER!

THAT WAS THE TITLE
BESTOWED UPON JUDGE
ROY BEAN, WHO DEALT
OUT JUSTICE IN HIS OWN
UNIQUE MANNER! ONCE
HE FINED A DEAD MAN
FOR CARRYING A CONCEALED GUN!

I DON'T CARE IF
HE IS DEAD! THE
LAW IS THE LAW,
AND THE FINE
STANDS!



HOLLOWING THE BATTLE AT THE LITTLE BIG HORN, SITTING BUIL AND HIS SIOUX MIGRATED TO CANADA! FOR YEARS THEY REMAINED PEACEFUL. BUT THEN THE URGE TO RECLAIM THEIR LANDS STIRRED THEM BACK TO THE WARPATH! THEY CAME IN GREAT FORCE AND FOR AWHILE, SEEMED TO BE MAKING GOOD THEIR PLAN! BUT THEN, CAPTAIN FECHET BROUGHT HIS HOTCHKISS GUN (THE FORERUNNER TO THE MACHINE GUN) INTO PLAY AND FORCED THE SIOUX BACK! THUS ENDING THE LAST SIOUX UPRISING!

PA STALEMATE BATTLE

BETWEEN THE TEXAS

RANGERS AND THE MEXICAN

MARAUDERS, CAPTAIN JACK

HAYS CHALLENGED THE

MEXICAN LEADER TO FIGHT

HIM IN SINGLE COMBAT:

THE MEXICAN LEADER

ACCEPTED AND WAS KILLED

BY HAYS' FIRST BULLET!

RANGERS WERE PROUD TO

CALL THIS TWENTY-ONE

YEAR OLD YOUTH THEIR

LEADER, FOR HE WAS THE

FIRST TEXAS RANGER!









PINGER COUNTY, MANY YEARS AGO THE RANCHERS
BOUGHT THE BEST GRASS LANDS IN LAUREL VALLEY,
DIVIDED IT EQUALLY AMONG THEM, AND USED THE
YALLEY AS A COMMON GRAZING PASTURE. THEN AS
NOW THE MOST FRIGHTENING, THE MOST
TERRIFYING WORD A RANCHER COULD HEAR WAS...

Stampede!

















A CAT. AND MAYBE RED FIRE! WHILE ALL THOSE STAMPEDED HE'S STUDYING THE HAPPENED BY ACCIDENT! MAYBE GROUND! THE LITTLE FOOL IS WABLE TO SOMETHING, EH, REASON BEHIND FELLAS? THEM

BUT THIS DIDN'T SATISFY RED FIRE ...

CURIOSITY KILLED

CREEDY'S TOO

TRUSTFUL TO THINK

I CAN EASILY KNOCK RED FIRE OFE WITH ONE SHOT! BUT IS A START A STAMPEDE, HE'LL BE TRAMPLED TO DEATH AND ITULIOOK LIKE AN ACCIDENT!









I'M A DARN FOOL FOR BEING SOFT-





THE RANCHERS' MEETING ..









































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